

IN THIS AGE OF HARD TRYING, NON-CHALANCE IS PREJUDICED

WHAT T. S. ELIOT wrote is found true: one re-reads the poems of Marianne Moore many times "always with exactly the same pleasure and satisfaction in something quite definite and solid." If one is an esthete and an analyst of literary pleasures, that almost ends matters: one simply goes on to the not easy business of explaining how Miss Moore gets her effects. The trouble is, the esthete finds it impossible to grade his pleasures beyond a certain point. After all, a number of literary artists are highly skilled and dexterous in the use of their medium. A number of them have—of one type or another—refined sensibilities, interesting and beguiling temperaments, sharp novel intelligences, and each of them grants a special satisfaction to the attentive reader. But how evaluate these various satisfactions? They are all alike in that they satisfy one in some given direction, but the directions are all different, and the esthete, it is perceived, must base his literary opinions in the final analysis upon his personal antipathies and preferences.

Yet there is such a thing as major poetry and such a thing as minor poetry, and it is indisputable that Marianne Moore is not a major poet but certainly an amazing minor poet. To say that is to abandon the esthete's position—without, let us pray, giving up esthetic perceptiveness. For the esthete there can be only good, indifferent and bad poetry. But for one who believes that poetry is not only a glamorous phase of life, but a vital function of life cooperating with other functions and occupying a definite place in the whole round of man's activity, there is a hierarchy of values to which all good poetry is subject and by which some poems are esteemed great and others are thought to be of minor excellence.

What is the distinction between major and minor? It appears to me that there exists none in detail or craftsmanship but that it is to be discovered in the pattern in which details are set and the purpose for which craft is employed. There is a difference in scope. The effort of the major poet is to be comprehensive *and* precise, whereas the minor poet values precision alone. There is a difference in purpose. The great poet's aim is to see totalities, to treat his experience, to treat life, as a whole. The minor poet is content with fragments of his experience, even with the isolated preception.

Hence, the achievement of the minor poet is style and design. The achievement of the great poet is Form—the microcosmic